

University of Dundee

Retro Inactive

Murray, Chris; Vaughan, Phillip; Charlton, Dave; Millar, Norrie ; Ronald, Alex ; Gibbons, Dave

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Retro INACTIVE



FEATURING
ALPHA
AND
ALPHA GIRL!

RETRO-INACTIVE

Vol. 1 No. 1

Summer 2018

Welcome to a self-indulgent celebration of my comics reading past!

First up is Retro-Inactive Featuring Alpha, Alpha Girl and their nemesis, the evil Dr Oculus. Alpha started in a comic I produced in response to a book I was writing - The British Superhero. When I was doing the research for this book I wanted to create something between a homage and a parody to a by-gone era of comics publishing. Now Alpha is back, and the starting point for this story was a sense of nostalgia for all the comics I was reading in the 1980s and 1990s, such as The X-Men, Watchmen, Marvelman, The Invisibles, Flex Mentallo and many more. This stuff blew my mind when I was a wee pup. Certain panels have always stuck in my mind, and when starting to write this story about being caught up in a wave of nostalgia, I thought about how these panels from different comics formed a weave of memories and interrelated themes. Bringing them together to form a new story was a lot of fun! I am very happy to have collaborated with artist Dave Charlton on this as I have admired his work for many years!

It is also incredible to have an artist like the eye-wateringly talented Alex Ronald on board! And a certain Dave Gibbons has also contributed.

No biggie.

The second story featured here is an oddity in all the right ways. This is an essay in comic form drawn by the phenomenal Norrie Millar. It ruminates on the power of memory and nostalgia. It was intended to be an explanation of the ideas, theories and thought processes that went into creating the Retro-Inactive story, and along the way it collided with Mary Poppins. My mum and sister loved the Disney Mary Poppins film so it was constantly on TV when I was young. I was reading comics and it would be on in the background. Somehow in the writing of my paper for IGNCC 2018, and in creating this comic, these strands of memory reconnected.

This comic is dedicated to the comic shops of Dundee, from The Black Hole, which was run by my friend (and the most important man in Dundee) George Cordiero, and Marshall's Bookshop, to the Zoo and Graphic Book shop (which was literally half pet store, half comic shop... it was weird), and all the other long-gone places of glory. You made me who I am.

**Chris Murray,
Dundee, 2018**



UniVerse

Editors:
Christopher Murray
Phillip Vaughan



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The fantastic folk who did the stuff!

Retro-Inactive Cover by Dave Charlton.
Buy Doc Oculus! Back Cover by Phillip Vaughan.

Retro **UNRACTIVE**



**A MURRAY & CHARLTON
PRODUCTION**

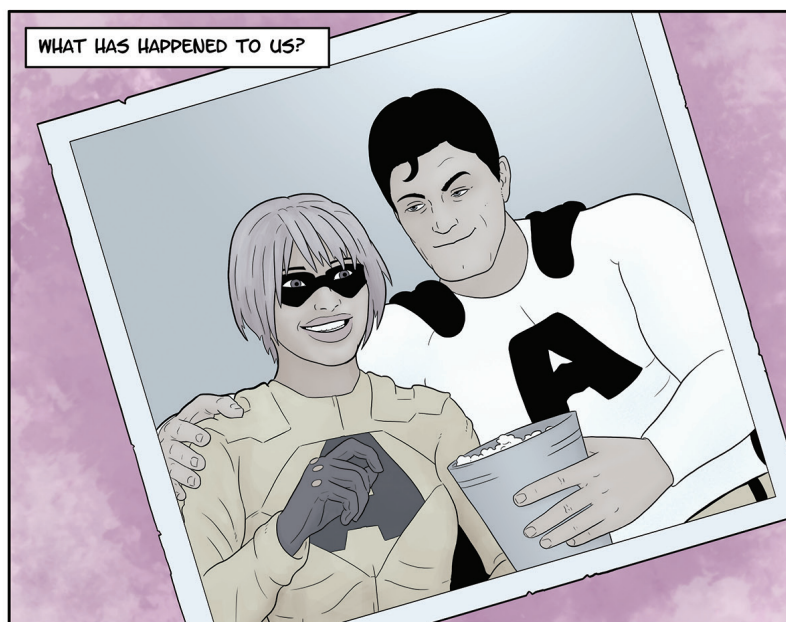
**AIDED AND
ABETTED BY**

**ALEX RONALD
COVER ARTIST**

**CHRIS MURRAY
EDITOR**

**PHILLIP VAUGHAN
EDITOR**

**ALPHA IS A
JERK!**

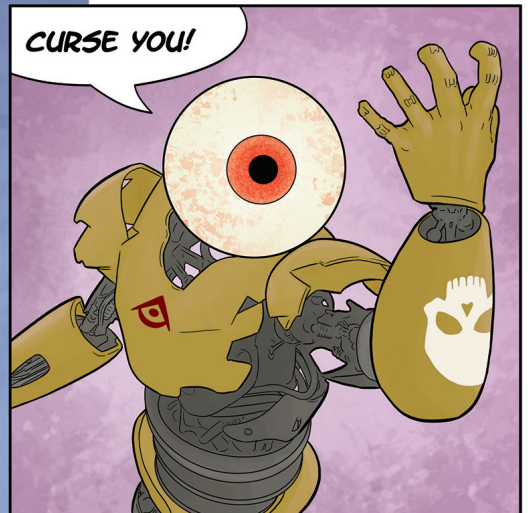




WE USED TO BE SO HAPPY.



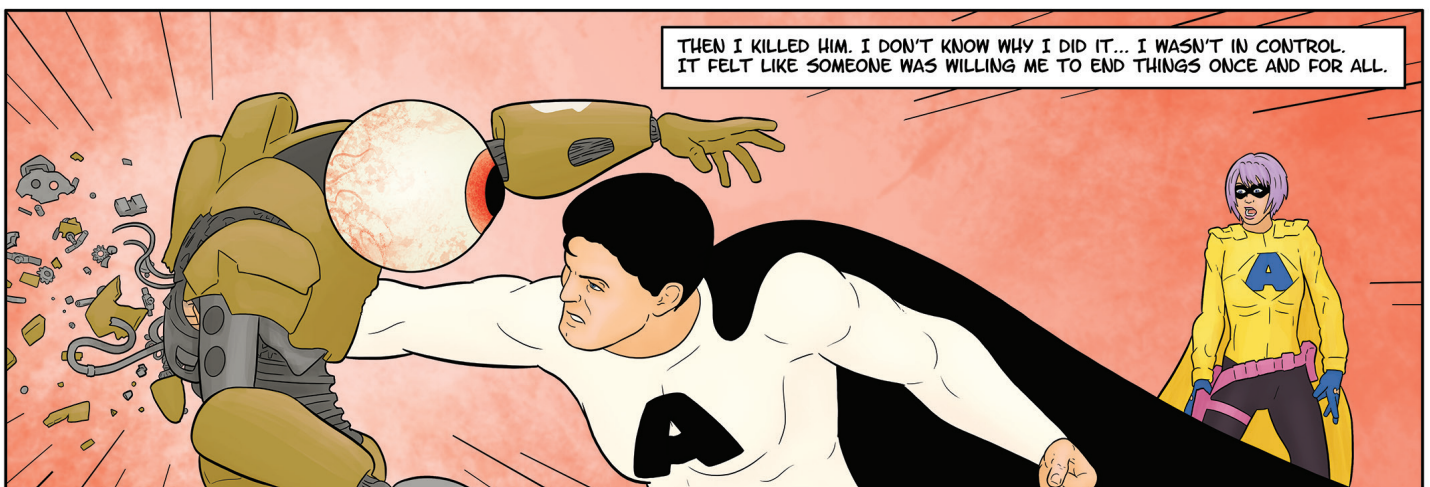
IT ALL WENT WRONG AFTER THE LAST BATTLE WITH DOCTOR OCULUS.



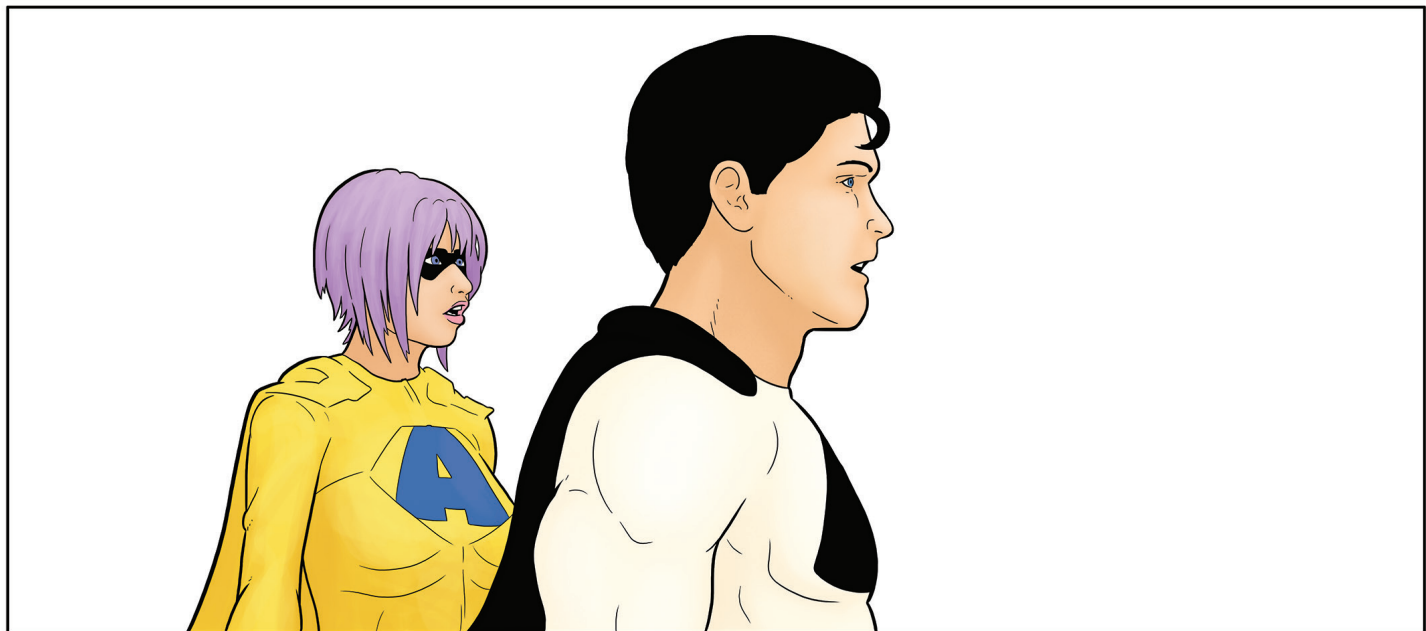
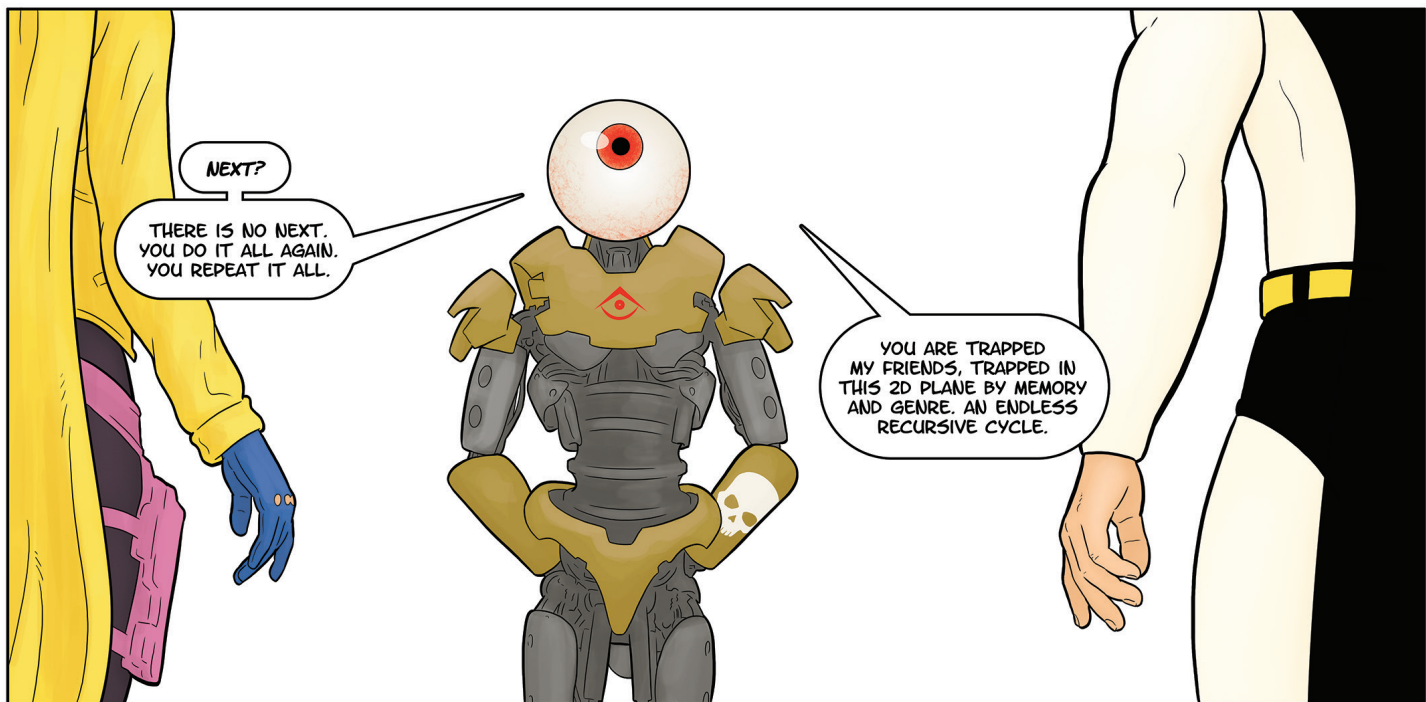
CURSE YOU!

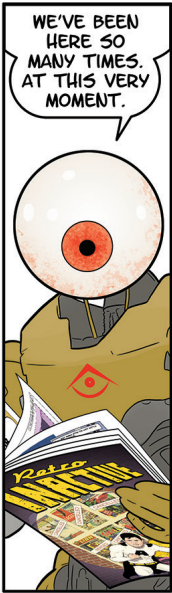


OCULUS PUT UP EVEN LESS OF A FIGHT THAN NORMAL. WE'D WON.



THEN I KILLED HIM. I DON'T KNOW WHY I DID IT... I WASN'T IN CONTROL. IT FELT LIKE SOMEONE WAS WILLING ME TO END THINGS ONCE AND FOR ALL.

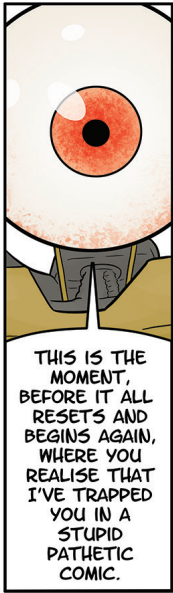




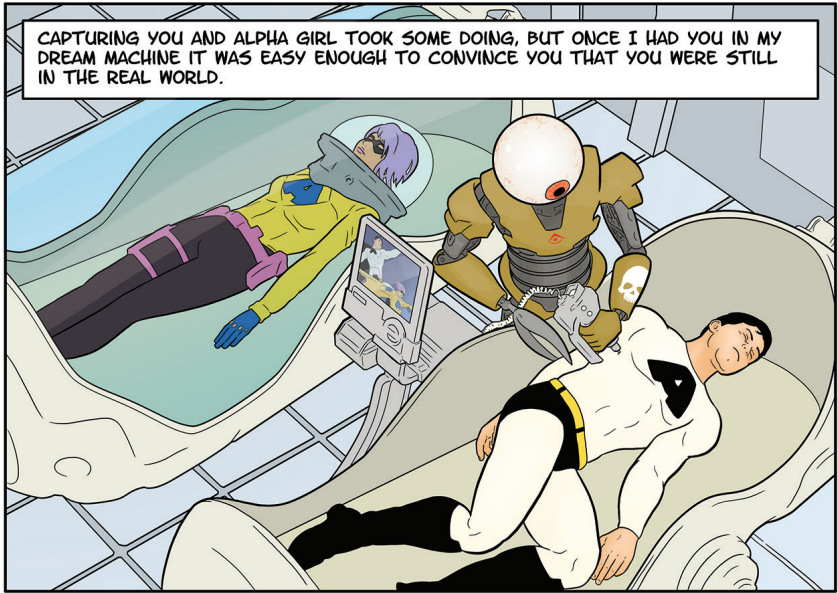
WE'VE BEEN HERE SO MANY TIMES. AT THIS VERY MOMENT.



I SAY "WE" BUT YOU MUST REALISE THAT I'M NOT REALLY HERE.



THIS IS THE MOMENT, BEFORE IT ALL RESETS AND BEGINS AGAIN, WHERE YOU REALISE THAT I'VE TRAPPED YOU IN A STUPID PATHETIC COMIC.



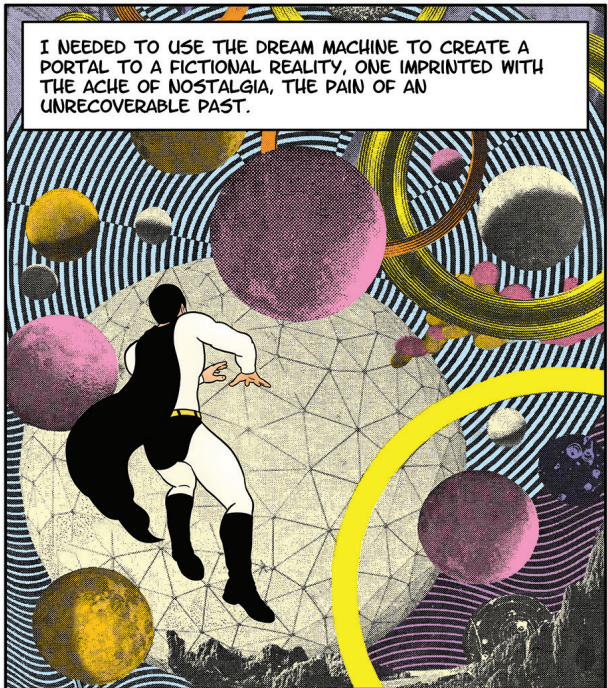
CAPTURING YOU AND ALPHA GIRL TOOK SOME DOING, BUT ONCE I HAD YOU IN MY DREAM MACHINE IT WAS EASY ENOUGH TO CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU WERE STILL IN THE REAL WORLD.



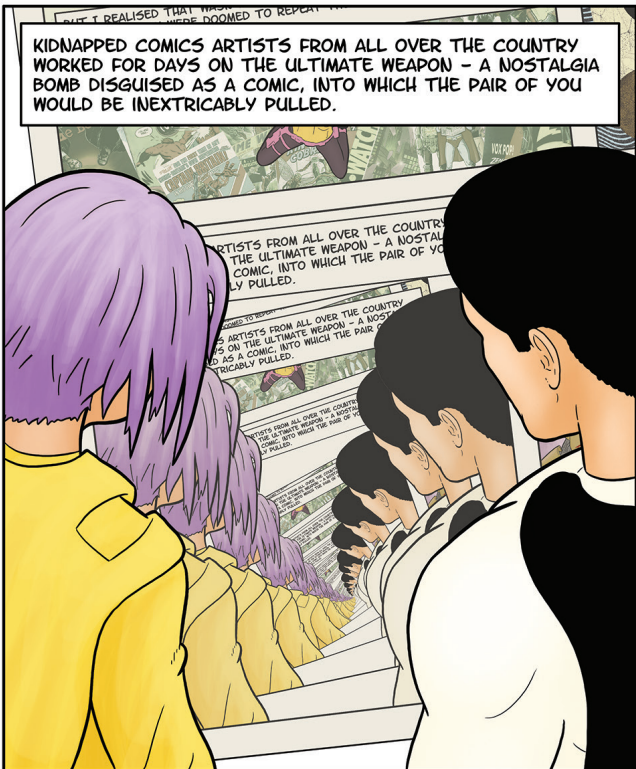
THE TRICK WAS TO GIVE YOU LOTS OF PUERILE STORIES TO ENACT.



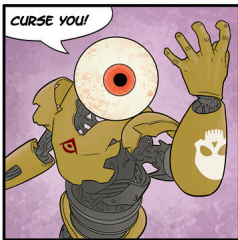
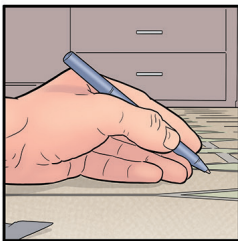
BUT I REALISED THAT WASN'T ENOUGH. ON SOME LEVEL I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU WERE DOOMED TO REPEAT THE SAME STORIES OVER AND OVER AGAIN...



I NEEDED TO USE THE DREAM MACHINE TO CREATE A PORTAL TO A FICTIONAL REALITY, ONE IMPRINTED WITH THE ACHE OF NOSTALGIA, THE PAIN OF AN UNRECOVERABLE PAST.



KIDNAPPED COMICS ARTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY WORKED FOR DAYS ON THE ULTIMATE WEAPON - A NOSTALGIA BOMB DISGUISED AS A COMIC, INTO WHICH THE PAIR OF YOU WOULD BE INEXTRICABLY PULLED.



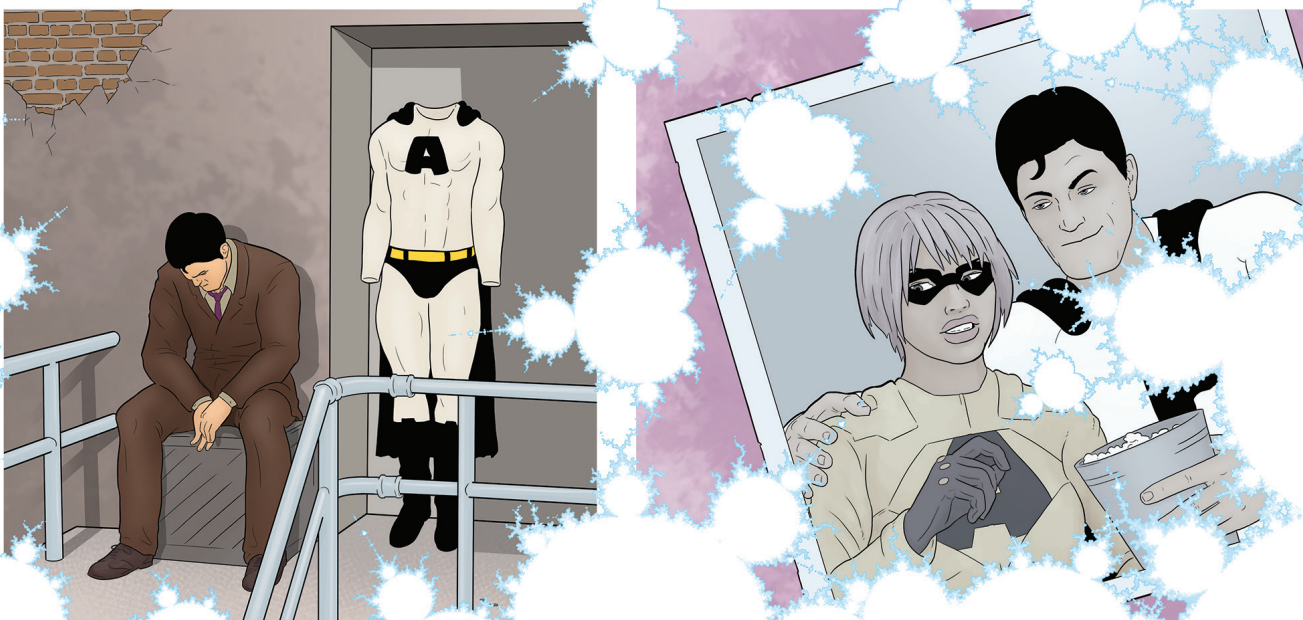
CURSE YOU!

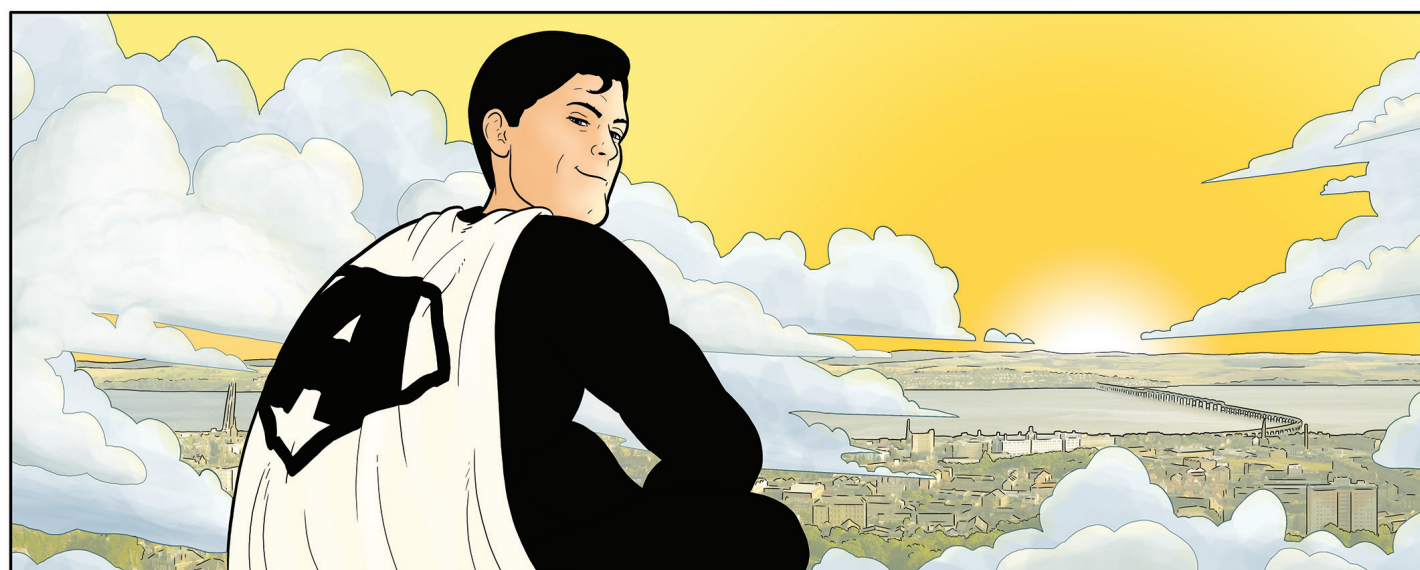
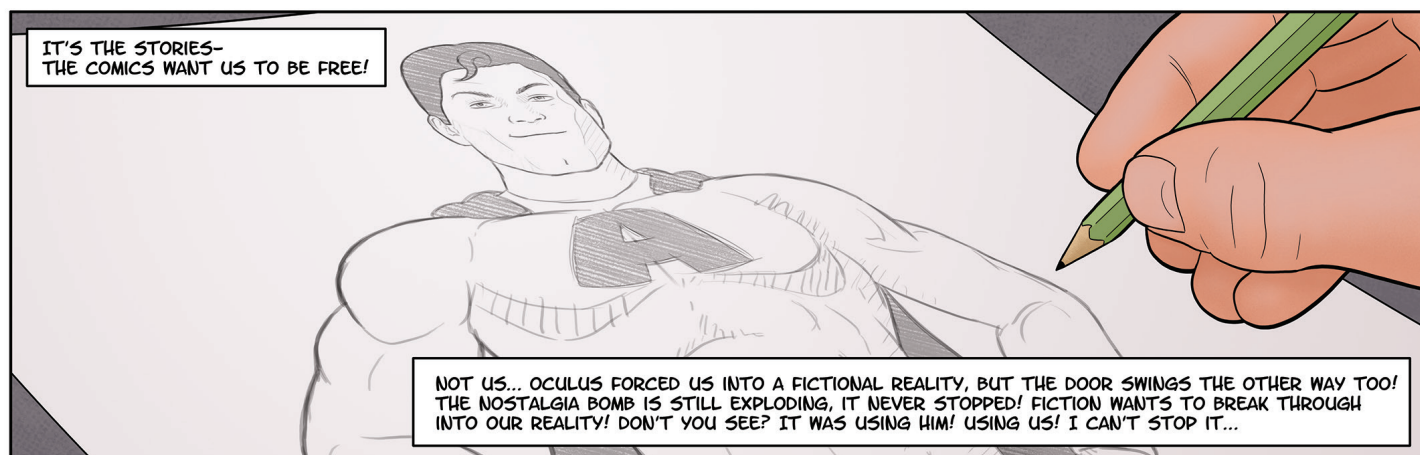
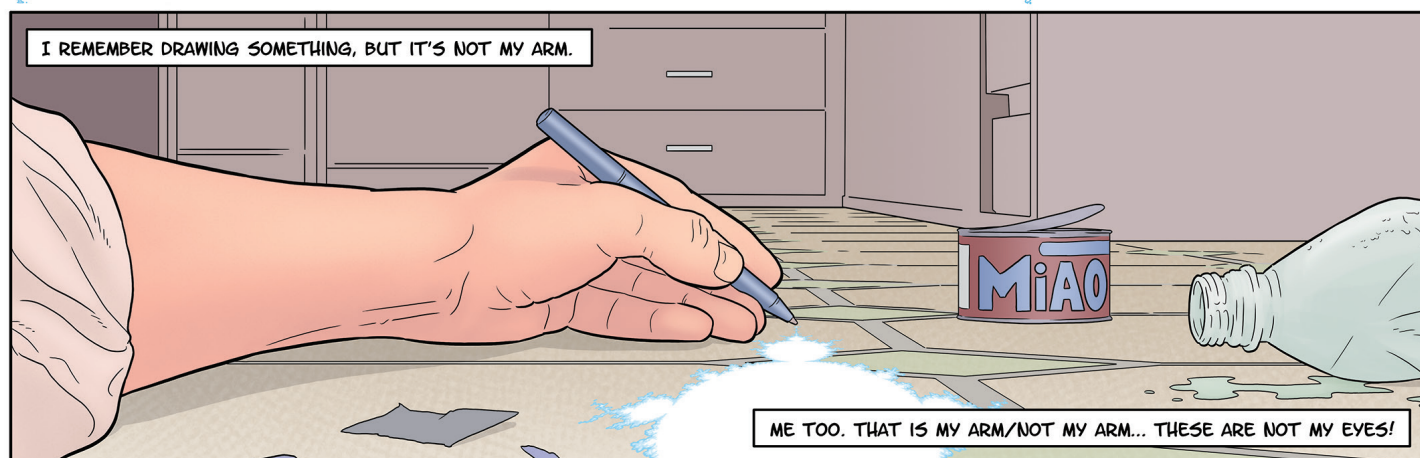
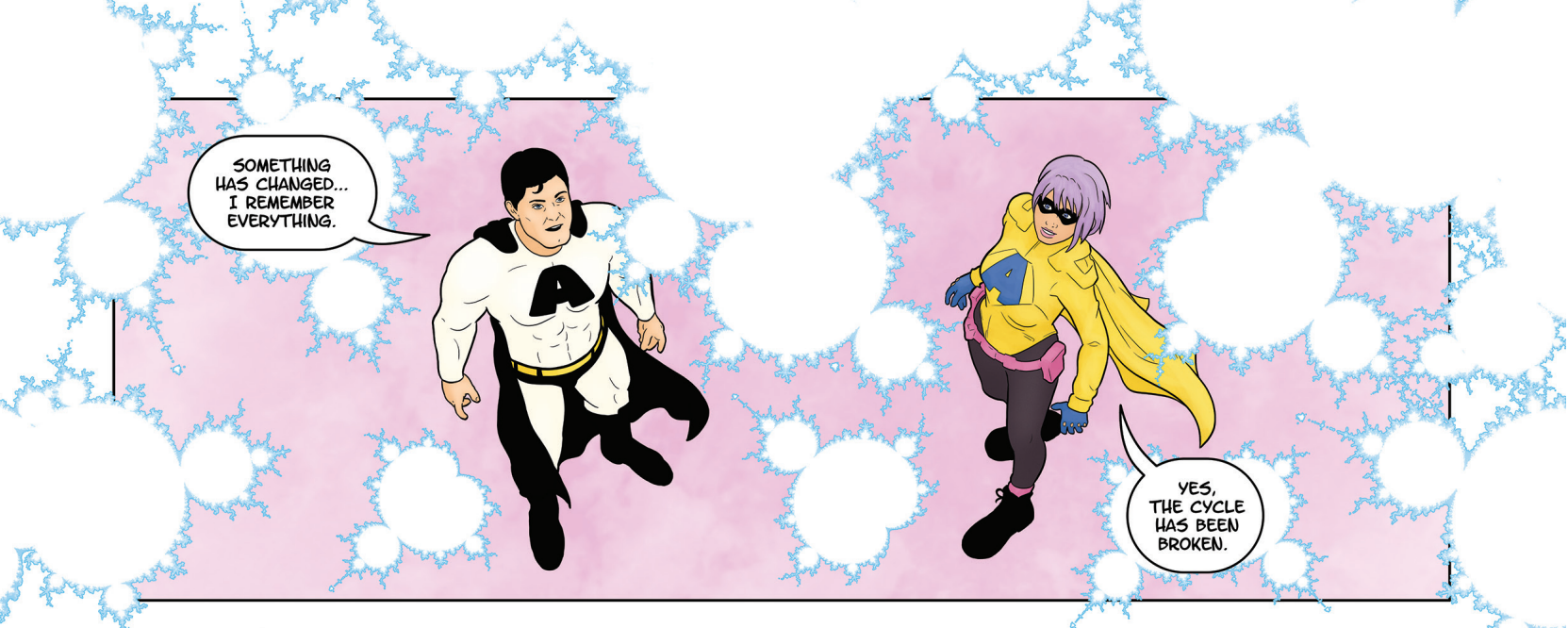


I CAN SEE YOU!

WAIT... WHAT? YOU SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO THAT!

**DOCTOR
OCULUS IS A
JERK!**







NEVER THE END.



SUPER-CALI-RETRO-COMICS-EXPIALIDOCIOUS!

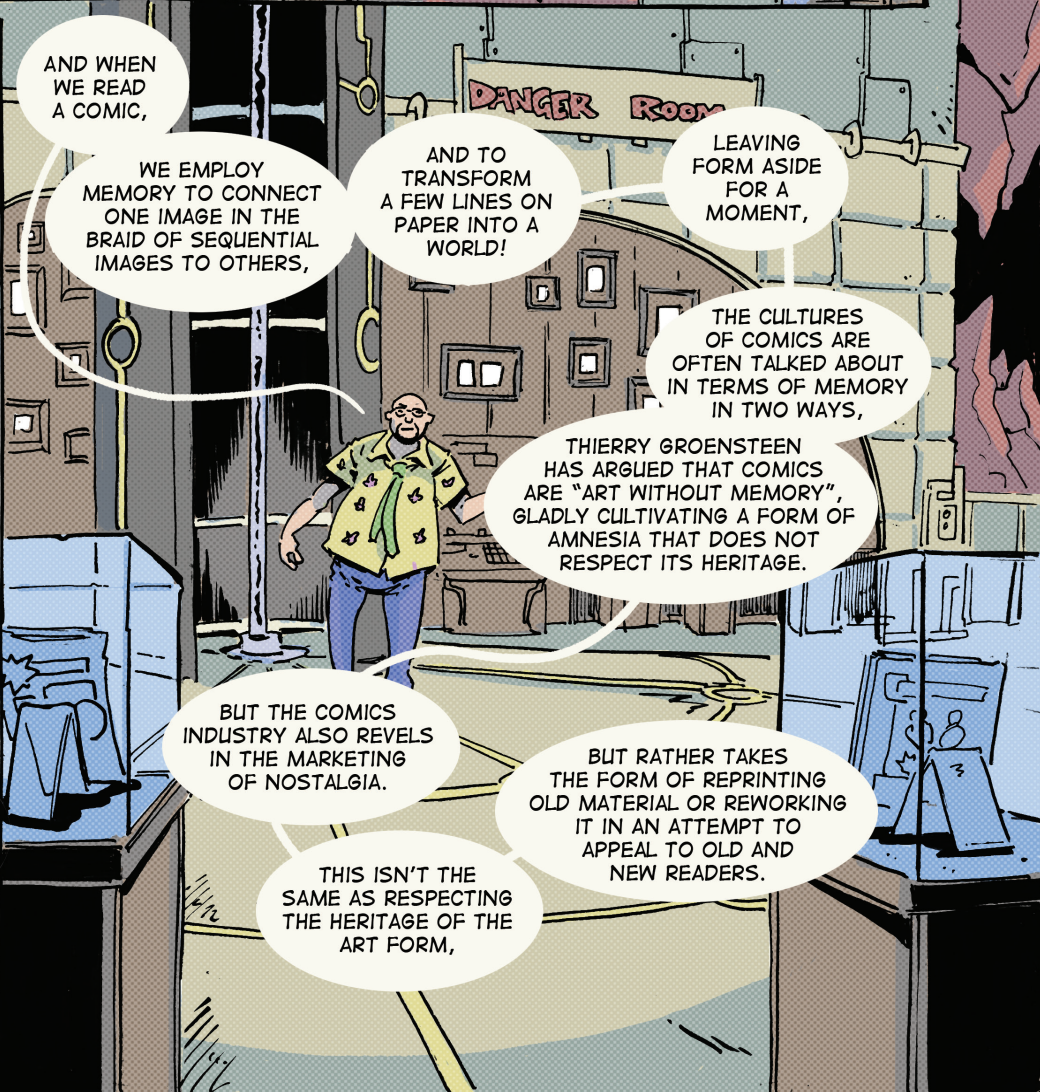
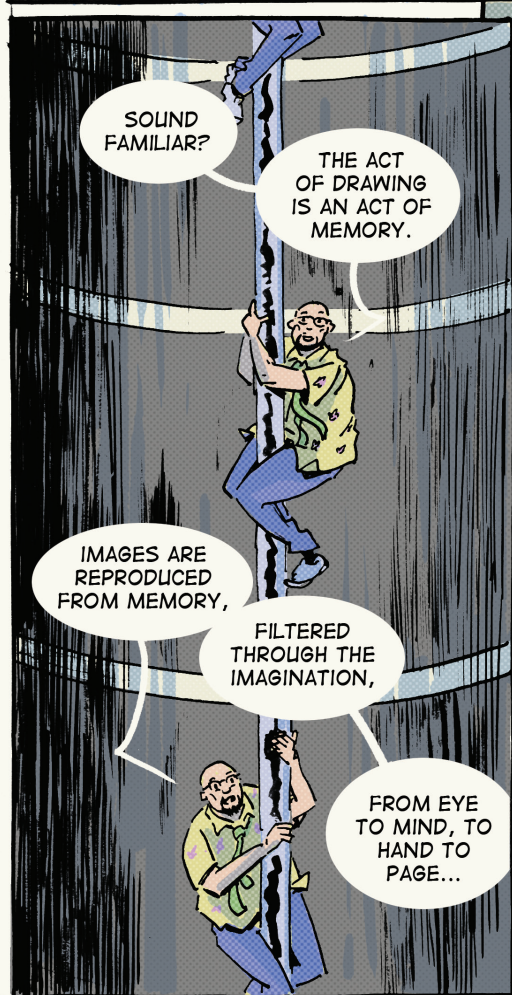
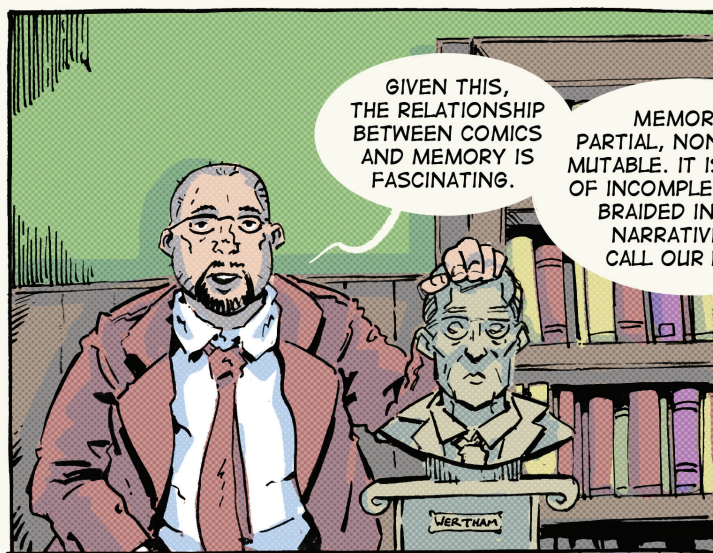
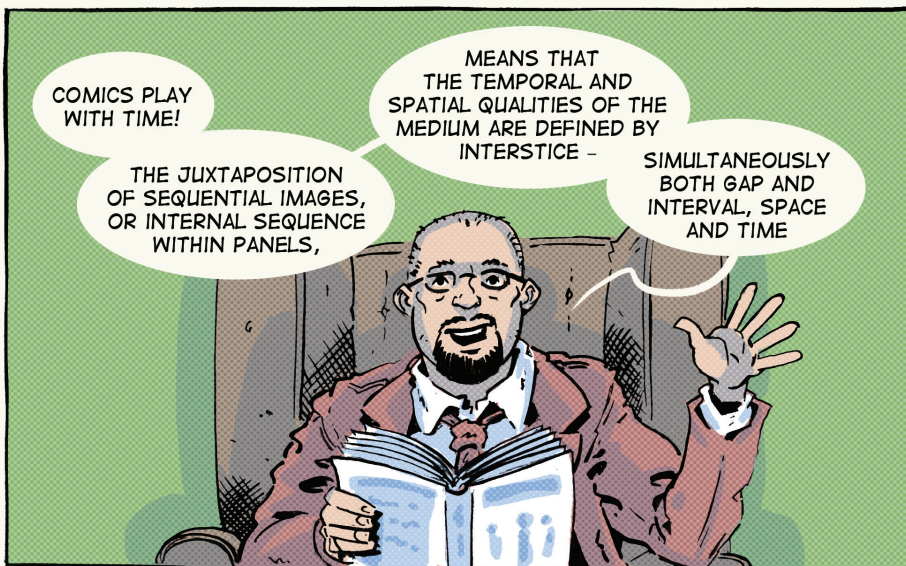


CHRIS MURRAY

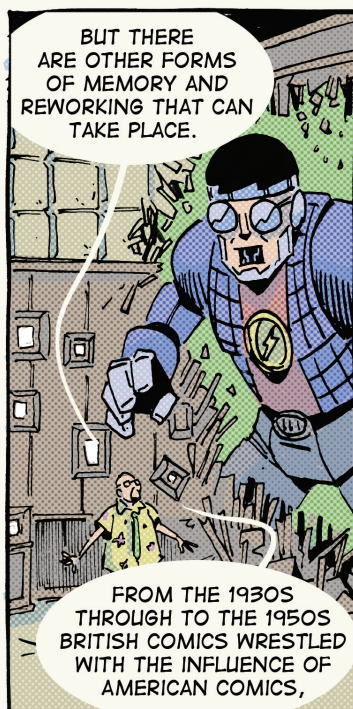
WRITER &
EDITOR

NORRIE MILLAR

ILLUSTRATOR/COLOURIST/
LETTERER

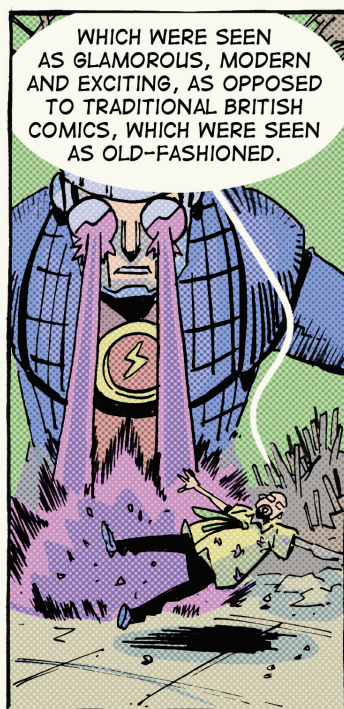


BUT THERE ARE OTHER FORMS OF MEMORY AND REWORKING THAT CAN TAKE PLACE.



FROM THE 1930S THROUGH TO THE 1950S BRITISH COMICS WRESTLED WITH THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN COMICS,

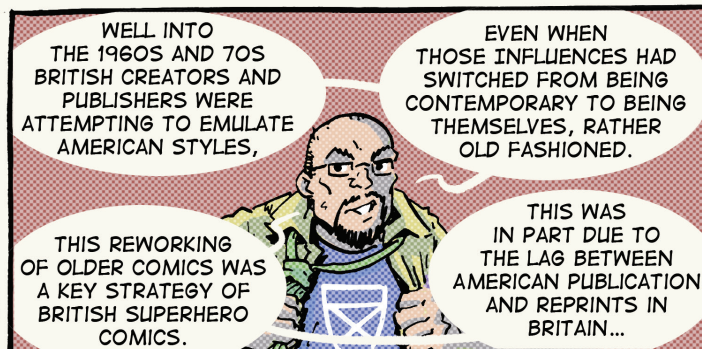
WHICH WERE SEEN AS GLAMOROUS, MODERN AND EXCITING, AS OPPOSED TO TRADITIONAL BRITISH COMICS, WHICH WERE SEEN AS OLD-FASHIONED.



WELL INTO THE 1960S AND 70S BRITISH CREATORS AND PUBLISHERS WERE ATTEMPTING TO EMULATE AMERICAN STYLES,

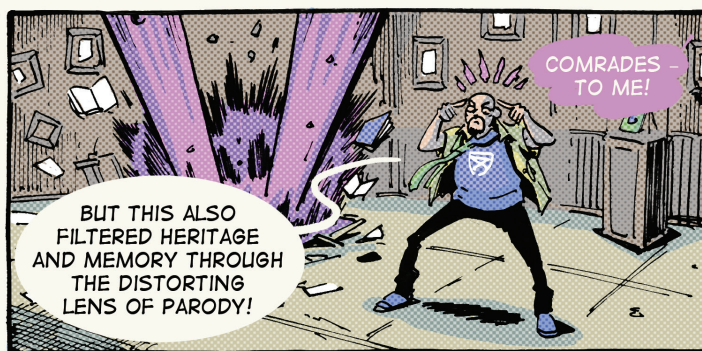
EVEN WHEN THOSE INFLUENCES HAD SWITCHED FROM BEING CONTEMPORARY TO BEING THEMSELVES, RATHER OLD FASHIONED.

THIS WAS IN PART DUE TO THE LAG BETWEEN AMERICAN PUBLICATION AND REPRINTS IN BRITAIN...



BUT THIS ALSO FILTERED HERITAGE AND MEMORY THROUGH THE DISTORTING LENS OF PARODY!

COMRADES - TO ME!



WHEN AMERICAN SUPERHERO COMICS WERE REPRINTED IN BRITAIN THEY WERE USUALLY ALREADY YEARS OLD,

AND RADICALLY ALTERED, BEING RECUT, RE-LETTERED, RE-COLOURED, AND OCCASIONALLY, PARTIALLY REDRAWN.

MOREOVER, WHEN BRITISH CREATORS CREATED SUPERHERO STORIES INSPIRED BY AMERICAN COMICS,

THEY ACTUALLY SUBVERTED THE TONE AND MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL, REFRAMING IT IN IRONIC WAYS!




THIS EVOKES THE THEME OF "RETRO", WHICH SIMON REYNOLDS DESCRIBES IN HIS BOOK RETROMANIA AS,

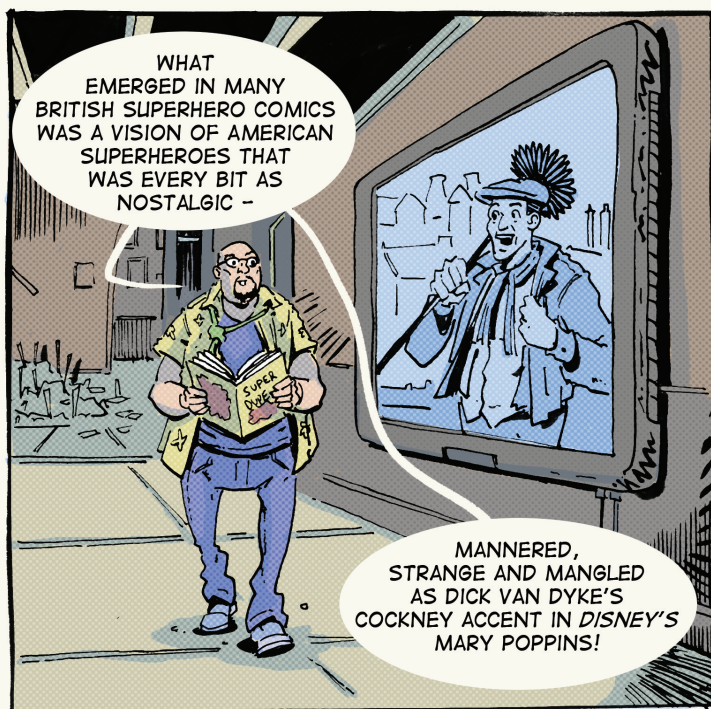
"A SELF-CONSCIOUS FETISH FOR PERIOD STYLISATION EXPRESSED CREATIVELY THROUGH PASTICHE AND CITATION [...] COMBINED WITH A SHARP SENSE OF IRONY".



MANY BRITISH SUPERHEROES HAVE OVER THE YEARS BOTH STRUGGLED WITH AND REVELED IN THIS TENSION,

MAKING FOR SOME VERY ODD REVISIONIST COMICS, MANY OF WHICH VEER WILDLY BETWEEN REVERENT NOSTALGIA AND VICIOUS SATIRE!



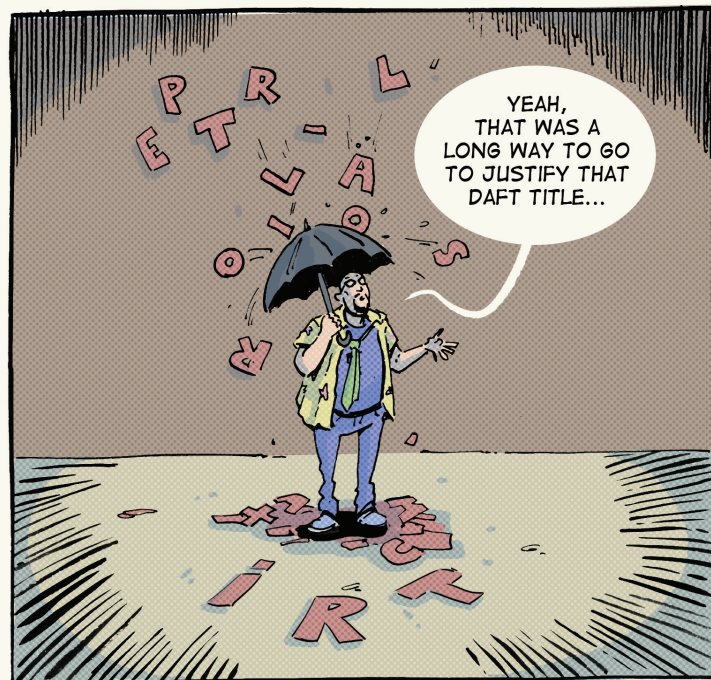


WHAT
EMERGED IN MANY
BRITISH SUPERHERO COMICS
WAS A VISION OF AMERICAN
SUPERHEROES THAT
WAS EVERY BIT AS
NOSTALGIC -

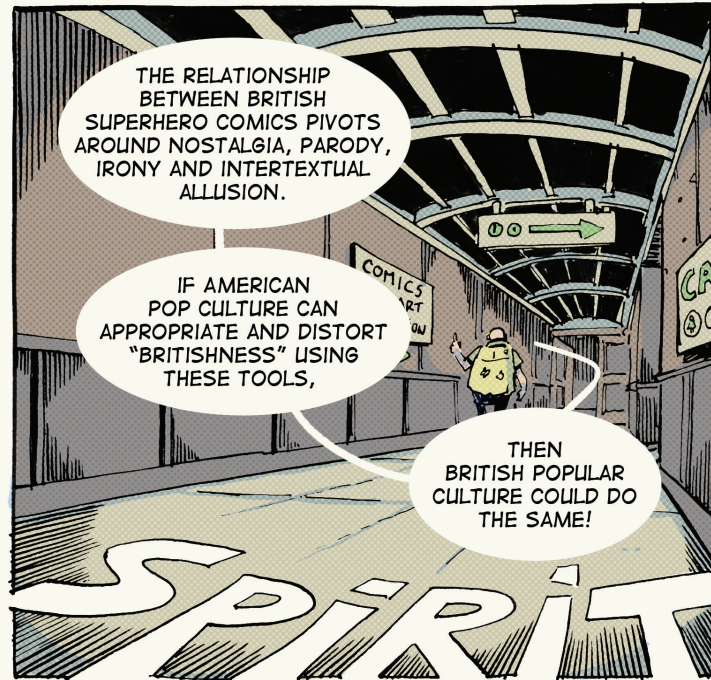
MANNERED,
STRANGE AND MANGLED
AS DICK VAN DYKE'S
COCKNEY ACCENT IN *DISNEY'S*
MARY POPPINS!



"SUPER-CALI-
RETRO-COMICS-
EXPALIDOCIOUS"



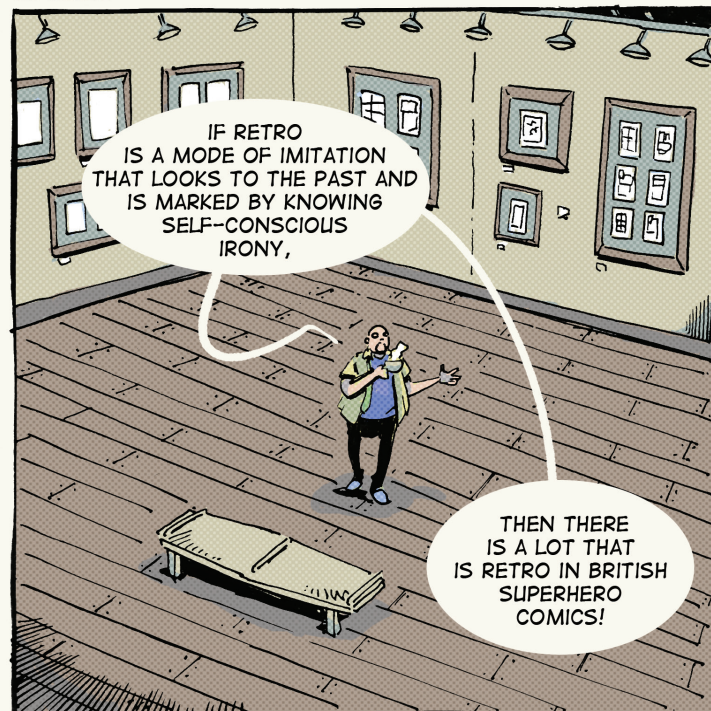
YEAH,
THAT WAS A
LONG WAY TO GO
TO JUSTIFY THAT
DAFT TITLE...



THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN BRITISH
SUPERHERO COMICS PIVOTS
AROUND NOSTALGIA, PARODY,
IRONY AND INTERTEXTUAL
ALLUSION.

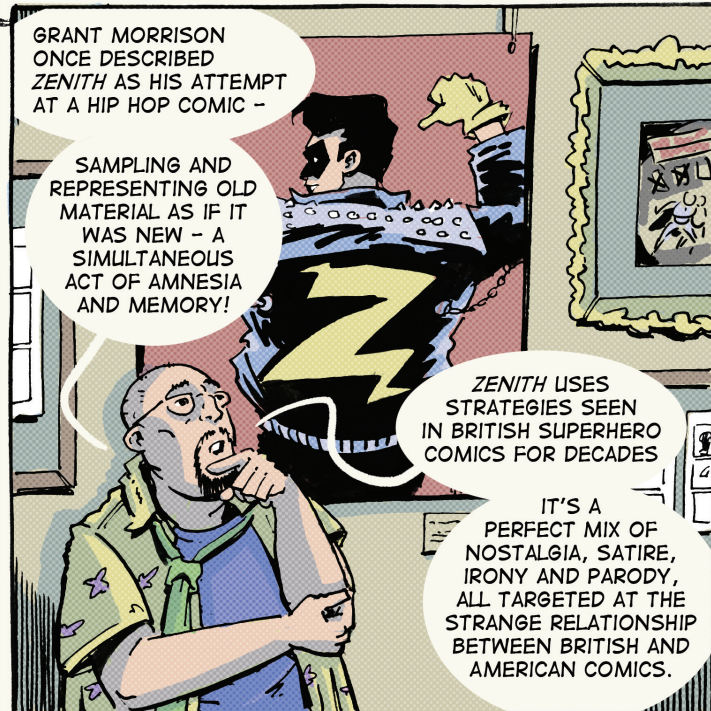
IF AMERICAN
POP CULTURE CAN
APPROPRIATE AND DISTORT
"BRITISHNESS" USING
THESE TOOLS,

THEN
BRITISH POPULAR
CULTURE COULD DO
THE SAME!



IF RETRO
IS A MODE OF IMITATION
THAT LOOKS TO THE PAST AND
IS MARKED BY KNOWING
SELF-CONSCIOUS
IRONY,

THEN THERE
IS A LOT THAT
IS RETRO IN BRITISH
SUPERHERO
COMICS!

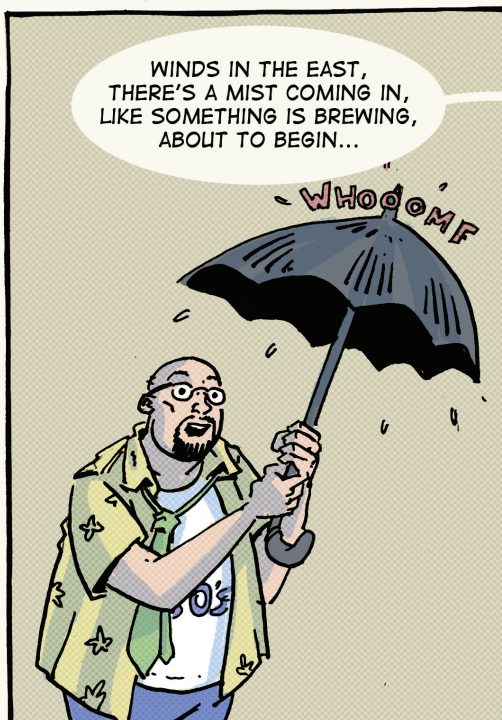
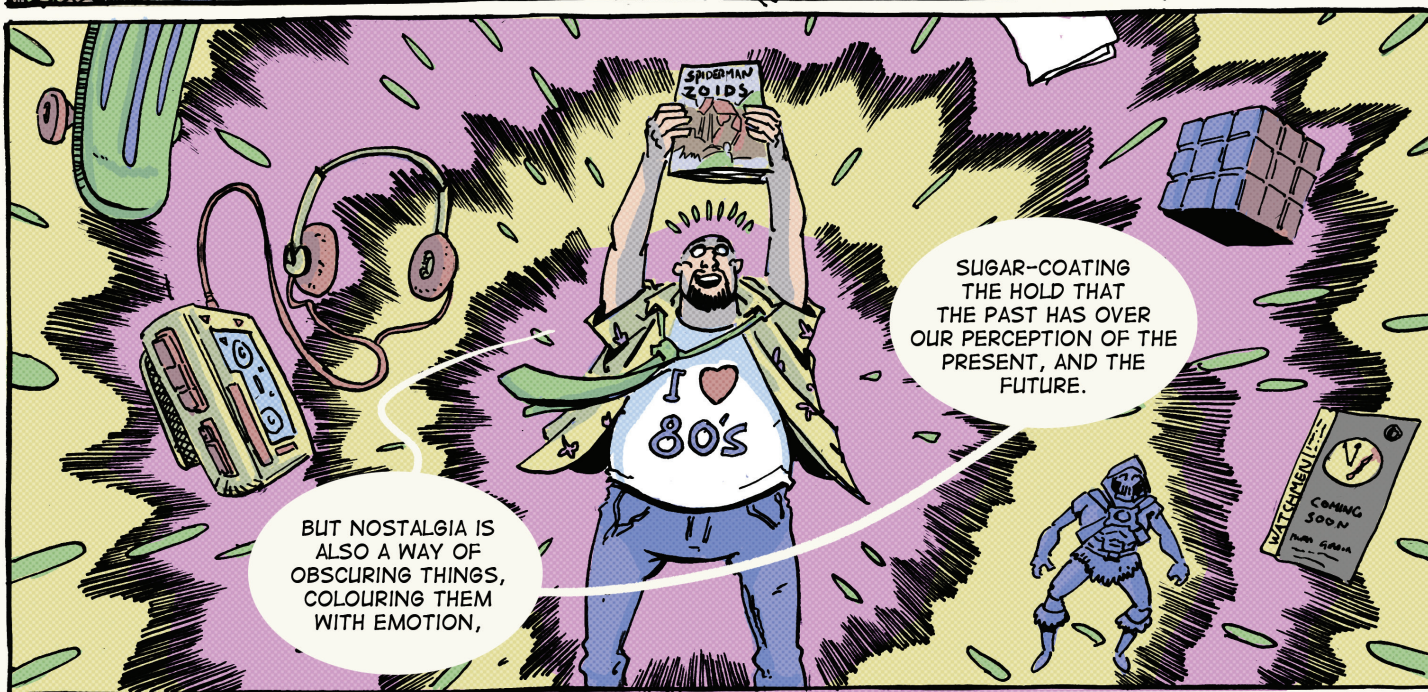


GRANT MORRISON
ONCE DESCRIBED
ZENITH AS HIS ATTEMPT
AT A HIP HOP COMIC -

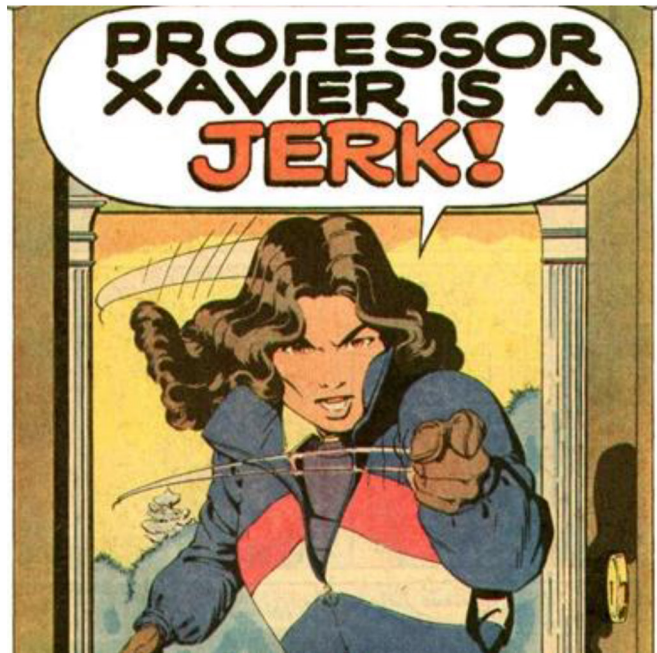
SAMPLING AND
REPRESENTING OLD
MATERIAL AS IF IT
WAS NEW - A
SIMULTANEOUS
ACT OF AMNESIA
AND MEMORY!

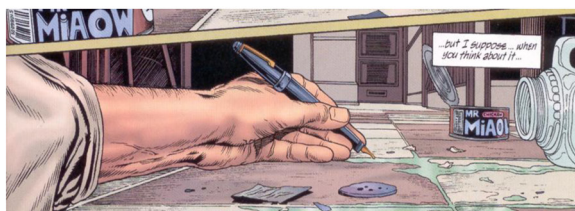
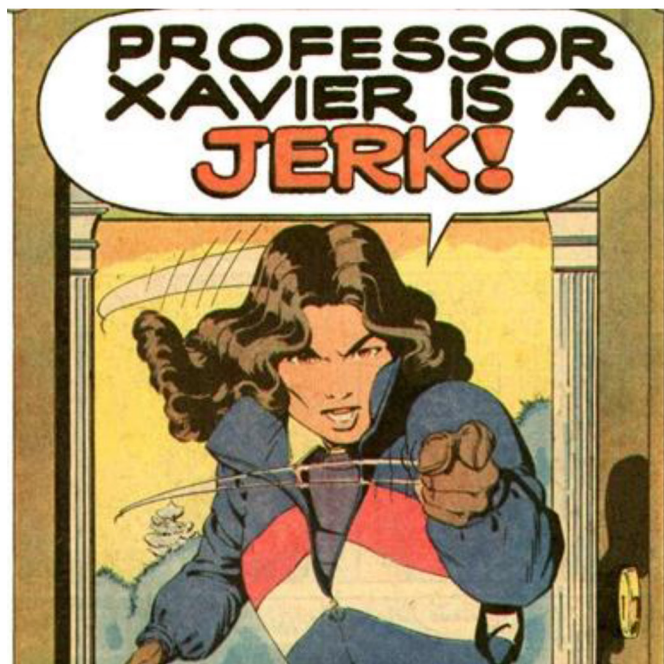
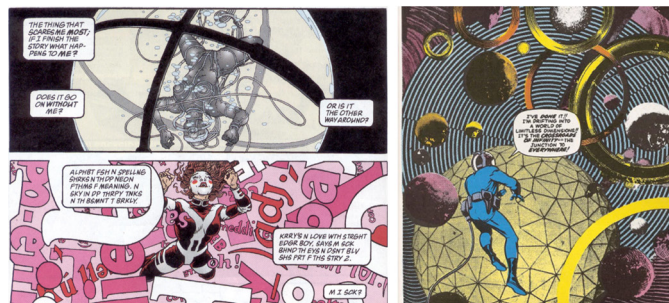
ZENITH USES
STRATEGIES SEEN
IN BRITISH SUPERHERO
COMICS FOR DECADES

IT'S A
PERFECT MIX OF
NOSTALGIA, SATIRE,
IRONY AND PARODY,
ALL TARGETED AT THE
STRANGE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN BRITISH AND
AMERICAN COMICS.



RETRO-INACTIVE REFERENCE IMAGES





RETRO-INACTIVE SCRIPT BY CHRIS MURRAY

COVER

Title: Retro-Inactive. Referencing X-Men #141, Alpha and Alpha Girl in front of a wall featuring covers of old comics. There are banners saying “cancelled”, “merged” and “banned”.

PAGE ONE

Panel 1

Referencing Professor Xavier is a Jerk page. Alpha Girl in identical pose.
Word balloon: Alpha is a jerk!

Panel 2

Referencing Watchmen. Alpha in identical pose to Dan Driberg. Alpha costume hanging up in closet behind him.

Panel 3

A photo of Alpha and Alpha Girl in happier times.
Caption: What has happened to us?

PAGE TWO

Panel 1

Alpha and Alpha Girl leaping over the city.
Caption: We used to be so happy.

Panel 2

Alpha and Alpha Girl confronting Doctor Oculus.
Caption: It all went wrong after the last battle with Doctor Oculus.

Panel 3

Doctor Oculus in Dr Doom pose.
Word balloon: Curse you!

Panel 4

Alpha delivers an Ozymandias style punch to Oculus. Alpha Girl looks on with a smile.
Caption: Oculus put up even less of a fight than normal. We'd won.

Panel 5

Alpha punches through Oculus's chest as Alpha Girl looks on in horror.
Caption 1: Then I killed him.
Caption 2: I don't know why I did it... I wasn't in control. It felt like someone was willing me to end things once and for all.

PAGE THREE

Panel 1

Alpha Girl is distraught. Alpha crouches over the destroyed body of Doctor Oculus. An undamaged Oculus floats above.
Caption: I... can't remember what happened next.

Panel 2

Oculus triumphant.

Word balloon: Next? There is no next. You do it all again. You repeat it all. You are trapped my friends, trapped in this 2D plane by memory and genre. An endless recursive cycle.

Panel 3

Alpha and Alpha Girl looked stunned.

PAGE FOUR

Panel 1

Referencing Pax Americana. Dr Oculus holding the cover of this comic (Retro-Inactive).

Word Balloon: We've been here so many times. At this very moment.

Panel 2

Dr Oculus turning the pages of the comic.

Word Balloon: I say "we" but you must realise that I'm not really here.

Panel 3

Dr Oculus lowers the comic and looks directly out of the panel.

Word balloon: This is the moment, before it all resets and begins again, where you realise that I've trapped you in a stupid pathetic comic.

Panel 4

Referencing Marvelman. Dr Oculus and his lackeys have Alpha Girl in a dream machine, and are in the process of loading Alpha into one.

Caption: Capturing you and Alpha Girl took some doing, but once I had you in my Dream Machine it was easy enough to convince you that you were still in the real world.

Panel 5

Referencing The Invisibles. Alpha and Alpha Girl floating in a tank, wired up the Dream Machine, with helmets on.

Caption: The trick was to give you lots of puerile stories to enact.

Panel 6

Echo of previous panel, but this time they have no helmets and are floating around surrounded by old British comics.

Caption: But I realised that wasn't enough. On some level I wanted you to know that you were doomed to repeat the same stories over and over again...

Panel 7

Referencing Fantastic Four. Alpha floating in a collaged Kirby-verse.

Caption: I needed to use the Dream Machine to create a portal to a fictional reality, one imprinted with the ache of nostalgia, the pain of an unrecoverable past.

Panel 8

Referencing Squa Tront! page.

Caption: Kidnapped comics artists from all over the country worked for days on the ultimate weapon - a nostalgia bomb disguised as a comic, into which the pair of you would be inextricably pulled.

Panel 9

Referencing The Filth. POV shot of pen held in hand. A larger, expanded version of this image is seen on the following page.

Panel 10

Dr Oculus, echoing Panel 3 on Page 2.

Panel 11

Photo of Alpha and Alpha Girl, echoing Panel 3 of Page 1.

Panel 12

Alpha looking around at the reader, no panel borders. Referencing Animal Man.

Word balloon: I can see you!

Caption: Wait... what? You shouldn't be able to do that!

PAGE FIVE

This is a repeat of Page 1, although a Mandelbrot shape is eating the corner of the last panel (referencing last pages of *The Invisibles*), and the word balloon in Panel 1 says "Doctor Oculus is a Jerk!"

PAGE SIX

Panel 1

Alpha looking up, like Dane from *The Invisibles*. Alpha Girl is also there. The panel/world is being eaten by Mandelbrot shapes.

Word balloon (Alpha): Something has changed... I remember everything.

Word balloon (Alpha Girl): Yes, the cycle has been broken.

Panel 2

Referencing *The Filth*. POV shot of an arm, with a pen held in the hand, very roughly drawing a Mandelbrot shape and an "A" on a tiled floor.

Caption 1 (Alpha): I remember drawing something, but it's not my arm.

Caption 2 (Alpha Girl): Me too. That is my arm/not my arm... These are not my eyes!

Panel 3

A sketch of Alpha, a slightly quivering pencil nib hovering over it. Referencing *All Star Superman*.

Caption 1 (Alpha Girl): It's the stories - the comics want us to be free!

Caption 2 (Alpha): Not us... Oculus forced us into a fictional reality, but the door swings the other way too! The nostalgia bomb is still exploding, it never stopped! Fiction wants to break through into our reality! Don't you see it? It was using him! Using us! I can't stop it...

Panel 4

Alpha, sitting on a cloud high above Dundee. He looks benevolently over his shoulder. But he seems different. Almost menacing. His costume is a bit different - like a mirror universe version of Alpha. Referencing *All Star Superman*.

PAGE SEVEN

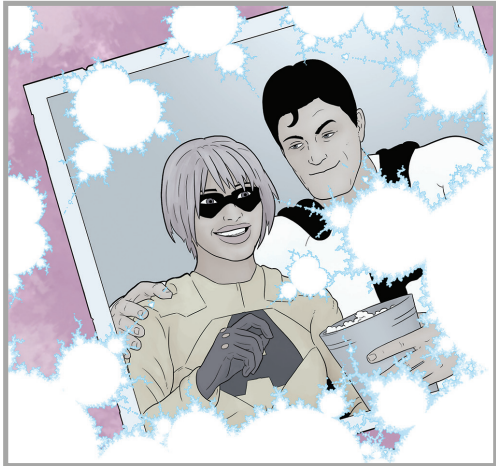
A full page image referencing *Flex Mentallo*. Doctor Oculus kneels at the bottom of the page, arms held aloft in despair. He is next to Alpha and Alpha in their Dream Machines. They are still asleep. A hole appears in the sky that looks a lot like a tear in a page. Through it fly dozens of long forgotten British superheroes, with dozens of old comics falling too. A copy of *The British Superhero* is in there too. A fictional, hyperbolic, super-changed Alpha and Alpha Girl lead the way.

Caption: Never the End.



DAVE GIBBONS
2016 -RV-

CREATOR BIOS



CHRIS MURRAY is chair of Comic Studies at the School of Humanities, University of Dundee. He is Associate Dean for Knowledge Exchange and Partnerships, leads the MLitt in Comics & Graphic Novels course, and is the director of the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies and the Dundee Comics Creative Space. He has published on the British Superhero, Alan Moore, and Grant Morrison, Horror Comics, Comics and Literature, and Comics and Propaganda.

DAVE CHARLTON is an Australian artist based in Scotland. In 2013 he won the Dundee Comics Prize and his entry Winston was published in Tales of the Universe #1. His new comic Guillotine will be coming out soon.



NORRIE MILLAR is a Scottish comics artist based in Dundee. He self publishes his own work and is also a freelance illustrator, providing work for numerous companies and publishers. www.behance.net/norriemillar

ALEX RONALD is a British comics artist. He has illustrated for Rot & Ruin (published by IDW), Wasted (published by Bad Press Ltd.) and 2000 AD as well as creating covers for Titan Comics' Doctor Who line. Ronald's work for 2000 AD includes Judge Dredd, Rogue Trooper, Vector 13, Sinister Dexter and Missionary Man.



DR DAVE GIBBONS is a British Comics creator and recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Dundee.

PHILIP VAUGHAN is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Director for the University of Dundee's MDes in Comics & Graphic Novels and also the MSc in Animation & VFX programmes, plus the creator and Module Leader of the Comic Art & Graphic Novels Undergraduate Expansive Module. He is also the Art Director at Dundee Comics Creative Space and the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies and Editor at UniVerse Publications. He completed all of the animation and front-end work on a Superman video game for DC Comics/Warner Bros and has created a strip for David Lloyd's Aces Weekly.



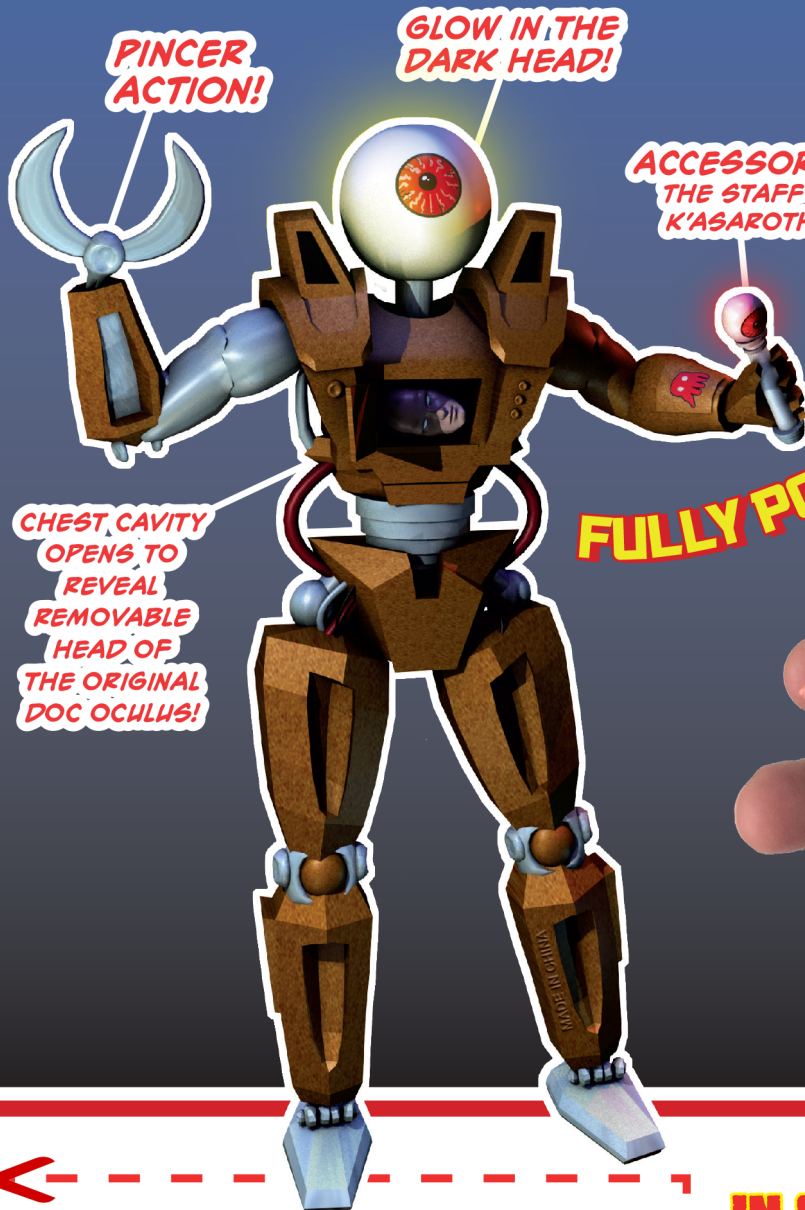
REBECCA HORNER is a cartoonist and colourist based in Ink Pot Studio, and is Workshop Coordinator at the Dundee Comics Creative Space. She self-publishes her own work online, has been published in many anthologies, and has done production on various books, including this one. www.rebeccahorner.com

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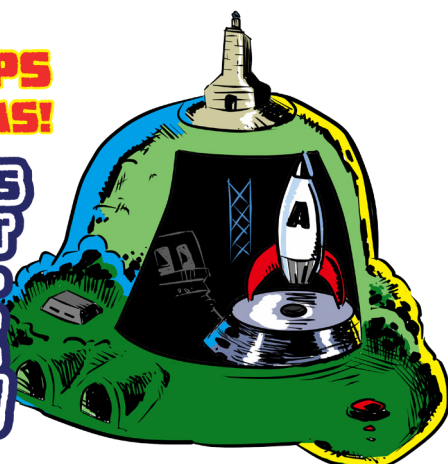
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